HISTORY OF THE
BETHLEHEM PIKE

Special Series
Vol. 2
Part 1

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Reminders of the pastoral age along the old road

HISTORY OF THE
BETHLEHEM PIKE

By

Elizabeth L. Myers

Transactions of the Moravian Historical Society
Special Series, Vol. II, Part I

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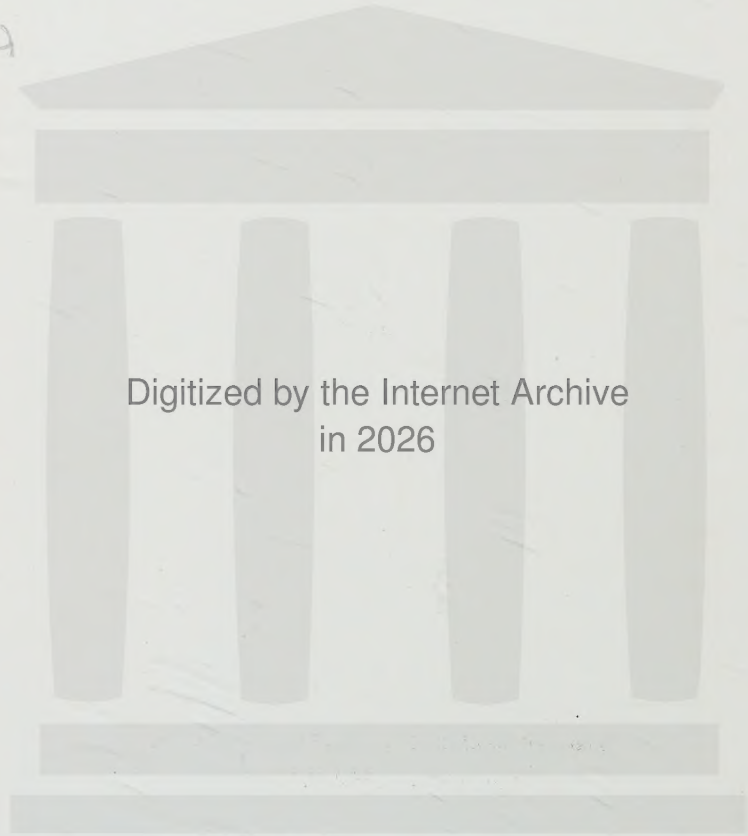

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FOREWORD

Thousands of American motorists will remember their trip over the historic road between Philadelphia and Bethlehem as a "Patriotic Pilgrimage."

No short automobile journey in the Eastern states can afford a finer opportunity of absorbing the inspiring atmosphere of early America than an afternoon's tour over this old "Bethlehem Pike," which runs from Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, forty-three miles to Main Street, Bethlehem. The traveler finds himself on historic ground from the very moment of his start, and the reminders of Washington and his supporters persist at frequent intervals throughout the two-hour journey.

It is a pleasant and picturesque trip, over hill and dale, past prosperous farms, through ancient villages, peaceful in trees, across sturdy stone bridges and their babbling brooks. Every league of the journey has its place in the history of our country. Two thousand years ago, a Roman writer declared that "a nation's roads are an index to its civilization, and the study of its roads an excellent way of learning its history." Here, then, is an important chapter in American history.

There is good reason for suggesting that the Bethlehem Pike is the oldest road in the country, because it antedates the discovery of America.

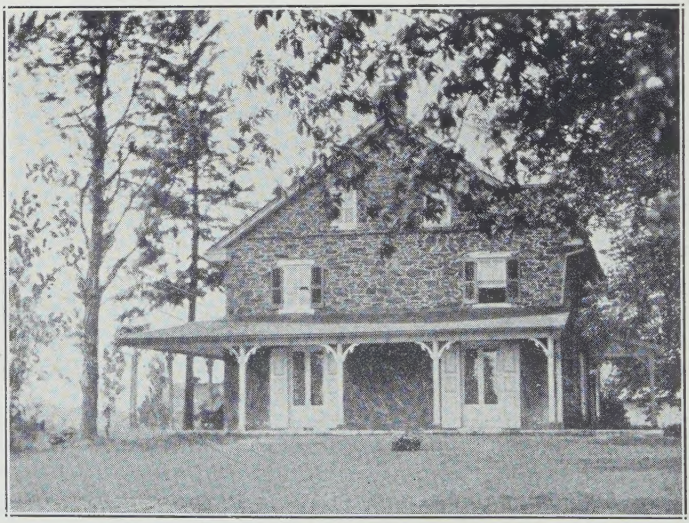
During the past ten years, the old Pike has become a great artery of motor traffic. To the motorist, it should be cherished as something more than a "straight line between two points." He should find additional pleasure in his journey because of the historic associations of the road over which he travels.

The automobile user has a remarkable opportunity today to become a leader in stimulating the study of American history, for he is in constant touch with our best sources of historical material, namely the country's highways. Every motorist should be a seeker after data regarding the historic background of our great American roads. He should be a member, figuratively speaking, of a

big history class embracing every patriotic motorist in America. The results of such a combined historical study would be enormous.

There is need for careful consideration of the best means for preserving and developing the historic background of our old highways. This indeed is a matter which should have the united consideration of both our legislative bodies and our great civic organizations throughout the country. Many souvenirs of ancient times are disappearing from day to day. Within the past year for example, the old "wheel" at the Wheel Pump Inn, on Bethlehem Pike, has been removed, although it might have been retained at small expense.

The preservation of our historic landmarks is a matter worthy of a nation-wide campaign in which motorists, educators, and patriots generally, should be enthusiastic leaders.



Beside the Pike are fine Colonial houses, peaceful in trees

THE BETHLEHEM PIKE

When William Penn first came to Pennsylvania the primeval wilderness lay before him, unmarked save by the foot of the savage. But the savages had already laid out certain trails, not from Philadelphia, then unborn, but from tidewater to the north and west,—west to the broad valley of the Susquehanna and north to the forks of the Delaware and beyond to the Blue Ridge or Kittatinny Mountains. The latter route was known as the "Minsi Trail," trodden out of the forest by moccasined feet along the waterways of the Wissahickon, the Saucon and the Lehigh. This trail still survives today in the famous Bethlehem Pike.

The spirit of discovery has led man onward and forward through all the ages of his development. The lure of the unknown led Columbus across enchanted seas to the New World; the call of the wild led Balboa across a continent to the Golden Gate.

Long years before them came the aborigines, bent on similar quest but traveling east instead of west. According to the annals of the Delaware Indians, it was about the twelfth century that their ancestors, who lived in a far-off country to the west, migrated to Pennsylvania, seeking a red man's paradise, a land of deer and salmon and beaver. In the great central valley, their historians say, they met another tribe, also migrating, and joineed forces. As they reached the Alleghenies they fought and exterminated an enemy tribe which sought to bar the way. Later they divided, the tribes from the great central valley becoming the Mohawks, and thee far-western tribe becoming the Delawares.

They settled along the banks of the Lenape Wihittuck, now called the Delaware, and here they found their Indian Eldorado. Its principal thoroughfare was the Minsi Trail, now Bethlehem Pike.

It was along this trail, already a well-defined path, that David Nitschmann and his party came to Bethlehem and Nazareth in the

bitterly cold December of 1740, patiently plodding along on foot, the servants leading pack-horses with all the worldly goods of the little group strapped upon their backs.

In December of 1741 a second party joined the first, traveling over the same road. The second party included Count Zinzendorf and his suite, who visited the pioneers in the log cabin on the banks of the Monocacy and on Christmas Eve conducted a love-feast service which christened the new settlement "Bethlehem."

With the increase in the number of settlements along this route, came a constantly increasing use of the road. From an indefinite Indian trail it became a colonial highway leading from the capital to the frontier, and was known as the "King's Road." Parties on horseback and freighters with heavy wagons widened the road, soon a few other roads converged into it, farmers fenced off their lands, and township supervisors put up cross-roads sign-posts. Traffic and commerce were definitely established, and at last the road became a good solid highway, the best there was in the eastern section of the state. It struck the Lehigh at Ysselstein's Island, which later was known as Jones Island, and still later was removed from the bed of the river by the Bethlehem Iron Company. It turned over toward the town of Bethlehem along the south bank of the river, up to the Crown Inn at the old ferry.

Pike begins at Germantown Avenue

Over this road, the first trip by "stage-wagon" was made by George Klein on September 10, 1763. After that he ran regularly between Bethlehem and Philadelphia, making the round trip weekly. He started on Monday mornings from the Sun Inn, Bethlehem, and on his return he set out from the King of Prussia Inn, Race Street, Philadelphia, on Thursdays.

The distances on the King's Road between Philadelphia and Bethlehem, as given in Bradford's "Account of Distances from Philadelphia to All Places of Note in the Improved Parts of the Province," are as follows:

From Philadelphia:	Miles	Quarters	Perches
to Poole's Bridge	0	2	65
to Norris	2	1	37
to Farmhill Meeting	2	3	35
to Rising Sun	3	2	40
to Stenton's	5	1	0
to Germantown Meeting House	6	1	30
to Mount Airy	8	2	52
to Scull's	10	0	22
to Ottinger's	12	2	35
to Francis	12	3	38
to White Marsh Church	13	1	33
to Benjamin Davis	16	0	54
to Baptist Meeting	23	1	57
to Housekeeper's	25	1	57
to Swamp Meeting	37	2	47
to Stoffel Wagner's	47	2	0
to Bethlehem	52	3	57

Wheel Pump Inn, where British officers gathered

These obscure stopping-places afterward became well-known to many distinguished personages who passed to and fro over the old road in the stage when, a few years later, Bethlehem became a place of great importance in the Revolution, but the names were changed with the times, and few of the old names now remain.

The "King of Prussia" was at Second and Race Streets, not far from Benjamin Franklin's printing shop, and the Bethlehem stage rattled away at a very early hour in the morning, turning up Front Street, then a beautiful river road. Crossing Poole's Bridge over Pegg's Run, it went on by Isaac Norris's country house and garden.

Crossing the Northern Liberties, as the unoccupied country north of the city was then called, the little hamlet of Rising Sun was reached, where the old York Road branched off. Legend says that here, at this crossroads, Tammany, the great Indian chief, presented all lands within vision to two young Germans of whom his tribe had become very fond. The gift was from the tribe "until the Great Spirit shall call them to the Eternal Wilderness." As the three stood there concluding their arrangement, the sun rose superbly, and the young men named the spot "Aufgehende Taune" or Rising Sun. The inn of that name was opened in 1746.

From this inn, the stage went on to Stenton, the home of James Logan, secretary to William Penn. His house is preserved

Baptist Meeting, founded in 1719

by the Colonial Dames and the Daughters of the American Revolution as their headquarters. In early times it was frequented by Indians using the Bethlehem Pike, by soldiers of the Province, and later by the patriot army. Washington used it as headquarters for a time. Logan named the stream that ran through his estate, after his Indian friend, Chief Wingohocking.

Beyond Stenton lay Germantown, boasting one long street, then Main Street, now Germantown Avenue. Up through Market Street and past Pastorious' Green Tree Tavern, now 6019 Main Street, the road stretched away to the north. Green Tree Tavern was built in 1748 by Daniel Pastorious, and old-time driving and sleighing parties gathered there for the meals which made the hostelry famous.

Mount Airy and Chestnut Hill, the latter a later addition to the stage-coach stopping places, are the beginning of the rolling, hilly country which is characteristic of the Delaware Valley. At Chestnut Hill the proper Bethlehem Pike begins today, many other roads converging there now.

At the foot of the long hill near the beginning of the road is the Wheel Pump Inn, where British officers frequently gathered in the days when their army faced the Colonials at Whitemarsh. The inn gets its name from the curious wheel by which water was raised for thirsty horses. Further on is Church Lane, leading up to old St. Thomas' Church. The hill on which this church stands

Walker Inn, more than a century old

was one of the hills in the Whitemarsh Valley where Washington held Howe at bay, and it became famous in history as Church Hill. To the left is Barren Hill, and to the right is Camp Hill. On the summit of Camp Hill is the Van Renssalaer country house, and near it the burial plot of the Scull family. Nicholas Scull, who is buried here, came to Pennsylvania in 1685 and acquired the land. His son, of the same name, was a famous surveyor-general under the Penns. This is the place called "Scull's" on Bradford's list of stopping-places.

Across sturdy stone bridges and their babbling brooks

This entire section is filled with memories and souvenirs of the patriot army, which encamped here until December 11, 1777, when Washington moved on to Valley Forge. The story of Lydia Darragh is a typical anecdote brought down from the early dwellers in Whitemarsh. Lydia lived in Philadelphia, and on the evening of December 2, 1777, a group of British officers used her house for consultation. She hid in a closet and overheard the details of their plan for a surprise attack on Washington's army. Lydia secured a pass out of the city to visit a flour mill at Frankford. She went to the mill, but hurried thence to Rising Sun Tavern, where General Boudinot was dining. Fearful of spies, she did not try

to speak with the general, but secretly passed him her old needle-book, in which she had placed a piece of paper containing her information. Boudinot realized its importance and hurried with it to Washington. When Howe advanced according to plan, he found effectual preparations against him and was compelled to fall back on Chestnut Hill.

Fort Washington lies just around the hill from Camp Hill, and the earthworks of 1777 can still be distinguished along Fort Hill.

Picturesque ruins of old zinc mine, Friedensville

From Scull's the road runs on to Ambler. Beyond, near Springhouse, is the Foulke mansion at Penlynn, where Sallie Wister wrote her vivacious journal which is one of the intimate accounts of life in revolutionary days. The porch in which she stood the wooden figure of a British genadier as a practical joke upon a certain Major Tilly, is still plainly visible, although the house has had many additions since that time. Sally, as the story goes, placed the life-size figure on this little porch at twilight, and then had a servant call the house-party into the hall with the cry "Is there any rebel officer here?" Major Tilly rushed out first, and when he saw the figure of a British grenadier, he bolted out of

the house and across the snowy fields to safety in the woods. This was more than Sally had bargained for, as exposure to the cold was no joke, so she sent another officer out to hunt for Tilly and bring him back. He took the joke good-naturedly and joined in the laugh on himself. And the story really ends there: there is no matrimonial postscript.

A few miles beyond is Montgomery Square, called "Baptist Meeting" on Bradford's list. Here are two old inns separated by the Pike, one of which was the headquarters of a gang of counterfeiters 75 years ago. The inn opposite is now abandoned. Mont-

Clergy House of Bethlehem Moravians

gomeryville, beyond Montgomery Square, possesses the Walker Inn, a house more than a century old. The present proprietor is keenly interested in the history of this district, and has collected many relics which he is glad to show to travelers.

The list of stage stations compiled by Bradford gives "Benjamin Davis" as the next stop. The name disappeared apparently with the farmer who bore it, for the place became known as Springhouse, a name which explains itself and which continues to the present time. Scarcely a village, it consists of a few old houses and an inn at the crossroads, shabby and worn, with some ancient trees casting a grateful shade in midsummer. But that old and

weather-beaten tavern has helped make history. During the Fries Rebellion in 1799, when Bucks and Northampton and adjacent counties were completely disorganized by the excitement stirred up by John Fries in opposition to the House Tax Law, this tavern was the heeadquarters for the militia. As the available regular troops were deemed insufficient, the state of New Jersey was asked for help, so Jersey troops joined the Provincials and both had their rendezvous at Springhouse Tavern, whence they proceeded north over the Bethlehem Pike. The little army halted at Line Lexington Tavern, called "Jasper Scull's" when Washington came across from Valley Forge in 1778. The curious name arises from the fact that the village is on the county lines, and in three townships. The tavern is in Bucks County, but the landlord takes his morning walk in Hatfield, Montgomery County. He sleeps in New Britain Township and votes in Hilltown. The tavern was for many years a changing-place for the horses of the old stage-coaches, and here the passengers had an hour for dinner.

From here, the Pike crosses the upper corner of Hilltown and enters Rockhill Township, where the combined armies of Pennsylvania and New Jersey, in 1799, listened to Judge Richard Peters,

A place to halt and invite one's soul

a member of the Colonial Assembly who accompanied them to rule on legal questions which might arise. At Sellers' Tavern, now Sellersville, they camped. This was a place of considerable importance, and Samuel Sellers, who established the tavern, was the leading citizen, and aided in the search for Fries, leader of the rebellion. He was found hiding in the nearby swamp. After his trial and conviction, President Adams granted him clemency, and Fries lived to a good old age.

The great swamp in which Fries hid is perceptible today in some of the back sections of the villages, but it has been reclaimed

From an old print of stage coach days

and tilled and provides wonderfully rich farm land. Early in the Eighteenth Century the agricultural possibilities of this soil were recognized by a party of Quakers who were traveling through. They halted at what is now Quakertown, and called the district roundabout the "Rich Lands," a name which is still used for the township and for the Quaker meeting. They built a meeting house at once, and this, called colloquially "Swamp Meeting," was the next stop for the stage coach.

Many landmarks are still visible along this part of the old Pike, which were viewed by the stage-coach passengers between Philadelphia and Bethlehem after 1750, but the landscape has

greatly changed. A century ago it was all beautiful woodland, with very little underbrush except for rhododendron, and carpeted with grass and moss, studded with ferns and wild flowers. Occasional clearings made by the axe of the pioneer dotted the forest with his log and stone homesteads, and always his churches, for these settlers were a religious folk. One such church, called now as then Appel's Church, is still standing. It was not far from here that the last stop was made before going on to Bethlehem,—at Stoffel Wagner's Tavern. This must have been an important stop, as all historians refer to it, but every trace of it has been lost. It is stated to have been two miles over the county line, in Northampton County, and it was probably located near the stone bridge over the Saucon, a scant mile south of Hellertown.

There is still pastoral charm along the old Pike

It is known, however, that the old tavern was built in 1752 on a tract of 184 acres patented to Stoffel Wagner by Thomas and Richard Penn. Lafayette stopped at Wagner's on his way to Bethlehem after the battle of Brandywine. Old Stoffel died about 1812 and is buried at Appel's Church, near Leithsville.

Soon after leaving Stoffel's, the stage drove through the little village of Helleretown, named for Christopher Heller, who located there in 1738 and obtained grants of land from the Penns about 1743.

At the present entrance to Saucon Park there stands an ancient mill. Here the creek is wide and shallow and is easily forded; but during the reign of King George III the county commissioners put up the stone bridge which is still in use. It is a fine example of the picturesque arched bridge so familiar to Pennsylvanians.

The stage-coach was a great object of interest to the citizens of Hellertown, as it clattered up the long street. All the villagers rushed to their doorways to watch its triumphal progress and its disappearance across the bridge ien a cloud of dust.

As the stage driver drew so near the end of his journey, he whipped up his horses and rounded the end of South Mountain, crossing the stone bridge over the Saucon at Iron Hill. The Bethlehem Ferry now lay before him, a difficult matter in unfavorable weather. But the Moravian brethren who operated the ferry were brawny of arm and strong of back, and generally contrived to get coach and horses and passengers safely to the other side. The run was finally completed with a flourish at the Sun Inn, where an open door was hospitably ajar and a heavy refectory table groaned under savory Moravian fare, while in the tap-room sundry straw-colored flasks and stone jars were made ready for the tired travelers. The Sun Inn still stands today, on Bethlehem's main street, an interesting and hospitable tavern.

During the Revolution the Pike and the Ferry saw busy times, for Bethlehem was crowded with the delegates to Congress, with officers and civilians, with soldiers and prisoners of war, with the heavy baggage and the wounded of the army. North and south they came and went, in the dust of summer and over the frozen ruts of winter. The Marquis de Lafayette arrived this way by carriage from Bristol in September, 1777, and drove directly to the Sun Inn, where he lodged for a week or two in the infirmary, for the care of his wound, later removing to the home

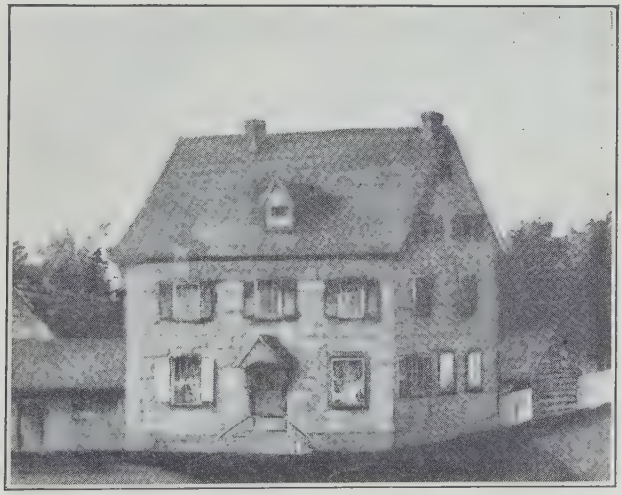
of George Frederick Beckel, the farmer-general. Here Sister Beckel and her daughter were his nurses for another six weeks.

On September 13, 1777, there was great excitement in Bethlehem because of the retreat of the patriot army from Philadelphia. Then a letter came by express courier from David Rittenhouse announcing that all the military stores of the army, in more than 700 wagons, were being sent north over the Bethlehem Pike. Even the church bells were sent away for safe-keeping, and also the bell that has since become a sacred relic, the State House bell, known to us as the Liberty Bell.

The farm wagon bearing the Liberty Bell broke down in Bethlehem. The entry in a diary under date of September 25, 1777, reads:

"The bells from Philadelphia brought in wagons. The wagon with the State House bell broke down here so it had to be unloaded. The other bells went on."

The breakdown occurred on the Seminary Hill, two blocks below the Sun Inn. The exact spot was somewhere between the entrance to the Moravian Seminary campus and Luckenbach's Flour Mill. Eventually the wagon was repaired and the bell went on to Allentown, where it was hidden in the cellar of Zion



Old apothecary's shop of Colonial Bethlehem

Reformed Church on Hamilton Street until danger was over. The broken wagon was repaired by the Moravian wagon-master, Frederick Beitel, whose descendants are still living in Bethlehem today.

A notable arrival at the Sun Inn on June 15, 1779, was "Martha, Lady Washington," who came from New Jersey with an escort in charge of General Sullivan. She was received by the citizens with suitable honors, shown all the "points of historic interest" and for her a special evening service was given, at which the choir and orchestra furnished a program of music. She departed the

First House in Bethlehem

next morning, bound south over the Bethlehem Pike to her Virginia estate.

On July 25, 1782, General Washington, accompanied by two aides, rode into town from Philadelphia. He also stopped at the Sun Inn, was entertained by the townspeople, and left next day at sunrise for Easton.

On the same date in 1783, there arrived in Bethlehem one of the most romantic figures of the Revolution, John Paul Jones, who came up from Philadelphia with his friend Samuel Wharton, the well-known Quaker merchant. They remained in Bethlehem for a month's holiday.

Another visitor during the same summer was Dr. John David Schoepf, a noted scientist, who later commented on the beauty of the "charming and placid Lehigh as we rounded the mountain from the Saucon Valley."

The Moravian College for Girls, now located in Bethlehem, is the oldest girls' school in the United States. It had its share in stage-coach life during the latter part of the Eighteenth Century. By 1785 it was definitely and finally established on its present site, and travelers on stage and in post-chaises were no longer all distinguished by sword and epaulet but often by weighty books and musical instruments in their picturesque cases.

As time went by, there was a greater and greater increase in travel over the old Pike. A shorter route was urgently needed, and it was decided to branch off at Quakertown from the old

Cedar Square

road and come more directly north, instead of taking the old route around the mountain by the Saucon Valley. This is the road now used through Coopersburg, Center Valley and Seidersville. It was completed in 1795, as a "public road over the Lehigh Mountains," and the old route was relinquished by the commercial stage line. The stage now made the trip three times a week. The first bridge over the Lehigh was built in 1794.

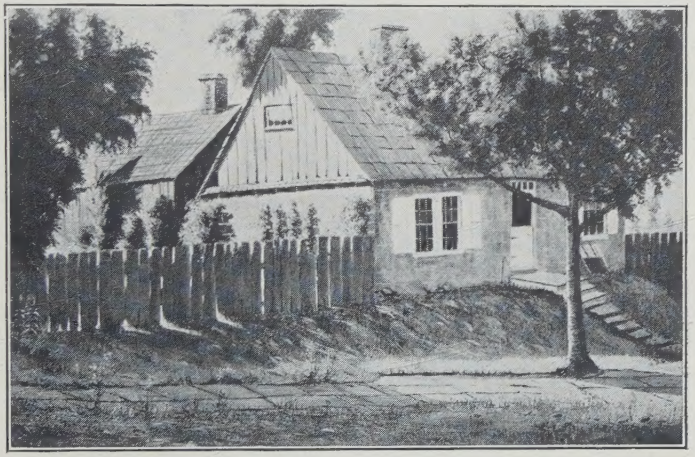
THE FUEHRER HOUSE (The Old Crown Inn), 1854.

Immediately after the beginning of the century, the question of turnpikes became an absorbing one, and the main artery to Philadelphia from the north, the Bethlehem Pike, was one of the first to be incorporated. Its incorporators were "The Springhouse and Bethlehem Turnpike Company," and they started their corporate life on April 4, 1805. But it was not until 1819 that the Philadelphia newspapers startled their community by advertising "To Bethlehem Direct! Through in a Day!"

In 1820, the line of Great Northern stages left the White Swan Inn on Race Street every morning at four o'clock. Their route,

according to their advertisements, was to Bethlehem, Wilkes-Barre, Montrose, Oswego, Geneva, Ithaca, Canadaigua, Buffalo and Niagara, the journey to consume five days. These stages reached Bethlehem in thirteen hours, at five in the afternoon. The driver, as he reached the top of the mountain, had his horn sounded long and loud, so that the people at the Sun Inn could hear it and make adequate preparations for his guests as he drove with a grand flourish up to their door.

The most famous of the old stage drivers of that day was John Feueraband, who started life on the line as a post boy and rose to be the greatest of the stage drivers on the Bethlehem



Old Indian chapel, Bethlehem

Pike. He drove four spanking grays, the finest stage horses in the country, and his whip never touched them though it sang many a song in intricate curves above their backs. Old John wore a patriarchal beard which blew around his face in picturesque abandon. Everyone who lived within miles of the Pike knew him. Mothers placed their daughters in his care when they were sent to the Moravian school, and "closing day" at the school was a busy time for him, with every maiden a personal charge and her baggage requiring his personal attention.

There was much charm lost when the ancient road was paralleled by steel rails in 1857. The railroad brought commerce and progress, to be sure; but the bell of the locomotive was the death

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knell of the pastoral age of Pennsylvania. The blast furnace of the age of steel is mighty; but so was the little forge of the pioneer blacksmith, for he welded the tools of the builders of a nation and he tempered the iron rims of the wheels—wagon and stage—which carried the infant industries of the founders of our nation over the old road across the wilderness. That road, still called the Bethlehem Pike, is one of the most interesting and historically important of our surviving monuments of early America.

Bethlehem's first fire engine built in London 1698;
Brought to Bethlehem on ship Hope 1763;
Cost in London £43 12s;
Still in existence.

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QUAKER MEETING HOUSE AT QUAKERTOWN

FIRST OFFICE OF BETHLEHEM IRON CO., FROM OLD PRINT

TABLET ON OLD CHURCH

TYPICAL BARN WITH "GOOD LUCK SIGNS" TO WARD OFF CATTLE PLAGUE